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The

Christian Sanctified

by the

Lord's Prayer

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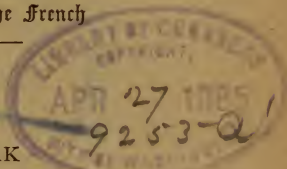
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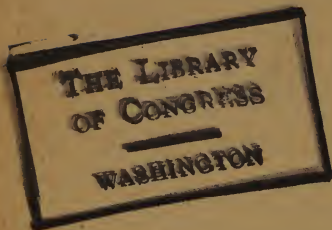
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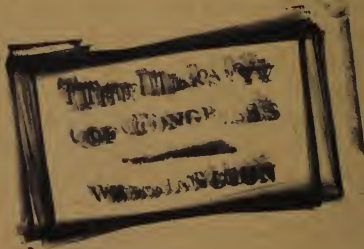
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PREFACE.

THIS little work was written during Père Grou's residence in England, probably about the year 1800. His editor says it was considered "one of the most precious fruits of his life of silence and labor" in that interval of twelve years that he spent at Lulworth.

In 1817, fourteen years after his death, an English translation of it was made by a Jesuit father, which, so far as we know, has passed entirely out of existence.

It might perhaps, at first thought, be deemed unnecessary to publish an exposition of the Lord's Prayer,—that prayer so simple that every child knows it by heart. But when we consider that it has been daily repeated all over

the Christian world for nearly two thousand years, and yet it is always fresh ; that nothing has ever been added to it, or taken from it ; that it is the model after which all Christian prayer has been formulated,—must we not admit, that, simple as its words are, it has a fathomless depth of meaning, an exhaustless store of holy treasure ?

It is only the divers who find the pearls and the buried wealth of the sea : so it is only those who, in prayerful silence and solitude, search out the hidden things of God, who discover and disclose to us truths we should never otherwise have known. Thus Père Grou has revealed in this familiar prayer of our Lord a fulness, a richness, and a profound application to every human life, which gives it new beauty and power.

The late Rev. Dr Ewer, in the Lent of 1881, examined this translation in manuscript,—it having been then just finished,—and was so much impressed by it, he read it for the instruction at Even Song, using it two special days each

week. Many inquiries were made with regard to it, all who listened to it being anxious to obtain a copy. Its publication has been necessarily delayed; but we trust that all who love the Lord's Prayer will now welcome this remarkable exposition of its several petitions, and will find it an aid to a higher and holier life.

ELLEN M. FOGG.

BOSTON, ADVENT, 1834.

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THE CHRISTIAN

Sanctified by the Lord's Prayer.

THE Lord's Prayer is incomparably the holiest and the most excellent of prayers, because Christ Himself is its Author. It comprises every right disposition of the Christian, both towards God and towards his neighbor; every thing which he requires, either for his bodily or his spiritual needs; and especially the assured means of obtaining the pardon of his sins. It is open to the unlearned and the simple; yet it has at the same time a sublimity to which the greatest genius cannot attain, a profoundness which

all study can never exhaust. It is suited to all ages, all times, and all conditions ; to sinners who wish to return to God, to penitents, to the pure and the innocent, to the righteous and the most perfect. It is adapted to enkindle coldness ; to sustain and increase fervor ; to inspire both the timid with confidence and love, and those who are mercenary and interested with views free from all self-love ; and to awaken in great souls the most exalted sentiments. The intention of Christ, signified in this prayer, is, that every Christian should offer it every day, and should begin the day with it. There are few, perhaps, who fail in doing this ; but what benefit do they derive from the practice ? From the earliest time, and in all liturgies, the prayer has formed a part of the office of Holy Communion ; and the Church has placed it at the head of every other sacred office. Christ has unquestionably comprised in this divine prayer, so short

and simple, all the points necessary to the sanctification of the Christian. But, that it may produce this effect, it is not sufficient merely to recite it with the mouth, however attentively. It is essential that we comprehend its meaning, and cherish in our hearts the sentiments it expresses. And even this is not enough : we must also put it in practice ; and our thoughts, words, and actions must be conformed to it. Otherwise, instead of sanctifying us, it will serve to our condemnation, when, at the last day, Christ shall ask us if we have lived in accordance with the prayer that he prescribed.

For how many¹ years have we recited it every day, and how many times a day? Have we ever applied ourselves to meditating upon it, and to understanding it better? Have we deeply penetrated the sentiments it contains? This point is essential ; for God pays no attention to that which merely flows out of the

mouth, and springs not from the heart. In short, are we living in such a manner that it may be said of us, our life is a perfect and habitual practice of the Lord's Prayer? This is what few Christians make any reflection upon. It would seem that their whole duty consists only in pronouncing the prayer as a formula which they learned in childhood, and they do not dream that it is for their continued help in the course of life. Though there are many expositions of it in all languages, I purpose to add another, avoiding equally the making it too long or too short. I shall endeavor so to write this little treatise, that every community of Christians may accommodate itself to it. To adapt it to the interior state and to the personal need of each, would require as many particular expositions as there are different classes of Christians. But this is the work of the Holy Spirit, to whom alone it belongs to proportion light and affection to

the interior character of the faithful. Let us therefore implore the grace He is so ready to grant ; and let me pray you to read this little book with the design of profiting by it.

CHAPTER I.

Our Father.

IN the various prayers which Jesus Christ addresses to God in the gospel, He always calls Him by the name of Father. This is because He is His Son by nature, begotten of Him before all worlds. God has adopted all of us in His Son. We are by grace the children of God, therefore the brothers of Christ. Before the mystery of this adoption was accomplished and fully revealed, patriarchs, prophets, and the righteous of the Old Covenant, scarcely employed any other name in speaking of God than that of God or Lord; they spoke of God also by His terrible name Jehovah, and with more fear than

love : but, since the gospel was given, we can and ought to call God our Father. Christ authorizes it : He even commands it. This, He says, is how you shall pray : “ Our Father who art in heaven.” On every occasion He makes use of this expression, “ Our Father in heaven ; ” thus placing us in some way on a level with Himself. He says, “ My God and your God, my Father and your Father.” Of all names, that of “ father ” is most tender and most sweet ; it is that which at once inspires respect and submission, love and confidence. These feelings are rooted in our nature, and we should be inhuman if we had no respect for our fathers according to the flesh. How much more just is it, that we should have respect for our Father in heaven, the only sovereign Lord and Master of every creature, infinitely adorable, infinitely good, infinitely lovely ! How many titles which may be applied to Him alone ! Is He not indeed our

Father? From Him we have our being : our souls and bodies, with all their varied qualities, are from Him. He has made us exactly as it has pleased Him, by a perfectly free volition ; and having no need of us, being infinitely happy in Himself, yet by His great goodness He preserves us every moment. Our life is a continual gift of His beneficence ; and, if He should withdraw His sustaining hand for one instant, we should fall into the nothingness from which He drew us. Can we doubt it, we who are not able to promise ourselves one moment of existence?

How, then, should we not love, how should we not fear to offend, the Author and Preserver of our being, who has not only made us for His glory, but has rendered us capable of promoting it? He has not only given us life, but He sustains it, and supplies every need. The whole universe exists for us only, and is designed for our service. Every thing

which renders this earth an agreeable abode, every pleasure we enjoy, is a gift from His hand. He permits us to use all, but requires that we should do so according to His revealed will, and with the gratitude which is his due. Ungrateful and rebellious children that we are, how dare we turn against our Father His own blessings, forgetting Him, abandoning Him for the vile creatures of earth, and grieving Him by our evil ways? Thou didst foresee this, O God, yet Thou hast never ceased the outpouring of Thy bounty. What earthly father would have done like this? It is this excess of Thy goodness that renders me the more guilty. Shall I still continue thus, notwithstanding the reproaches of my conscience, Thy voice within me? Ah! take back Thy gifts, take away even my life, rather than that I should still offend Thee. Thou art my Father by creation, and much more my Father by grace. This temporal

life which I enjoy for a brief space is nothing compared with the eternal life for which Thou hast destined me, and which is my true end. What, indeed, is that life? It is a life where I shall "see Thee face to face;" where I "shall know Thee as I am known;" where I shall possess Thee, the sovereign good; where I shall share with Thee ineffable bliss. Yes, the heritage Thou hast reserved for me as Thy child is none other than Thyself. My infinitely great reward for having loved Thee on earth, the real and only happiness of my present state, will be to love Thee forever in heaven, and to be filled with this love. I believe this upon Thy word, but I cannot conceive it; and it is essential to my happiness, that it should be so great I cannot possibly comprehend it. This happiness is not only for my soul, but it is also destined for my body, which will participate in its own way in the glorious qualities with which my

soul will be adorned. This, O my Father, is what from all eternity Thou hast designed for me. Thou wouldst have withdrawn from me all the evils of this present life, even death itself, had not the disobedience of my first parents placed an obstacle in the way. But this obstacle, insurmountable to all but Thyself, how Thy paternal love has removed it ! This incalculable wrong which they have done me, how hast Thou repaired it ! Ah ! who would have thought it, who would have believed it, if Thou hadst not Thyself revealed it ? Thou hast given thine own, thine only Son, in all things equal to thyself. Because Thou didst will it, and He also did will it, He humbled Himself, and was made man, taking our human flesh, that He might suffer and die for the whole human race : for me, in my place, to expiate my sins, to reconcile me to His Father ; to give me the privilege of being called the child of God, of which I had

become unworthy ; to re-establish me in my right of celestial inheritance, of which I had been deprived. Beyond all this is the supernatural life which I receive from Thee by Jesus Christ ; those graces and means of salvation which Thou dost lavish upon me ; that paternal care and tenderness which Thou dost manifest ; that inconceivable goodness, always ready to pardon me when I return to Thee, even after the most grievous sins, a thousand times repeated ; that deep, yearning compassion, which leads Thee to run after me when I go astray, to recall me, to extend Thy hand to raise me up again, to carry me in Thine arms, and to rejoice at finding me, as if it were a gain to Thee, as if Thou wert more interested in my salvation than I am myself. If God is so loving a Father towards sinners who sincerely return to Him, as so many illustrious penitents attest, and as we have perhaps experienced ourselves, what

must He be toward pure and innocent souls who have kept His grace, and have had no other desire than to please Him? Christian soul, do not limit thyself here to the consideration of general benefits, whether natural or supernatural. Consider, as far as thou canst, all that God has done for thee in particular. There is not one instant of thy life that is not marked by some kind of benevolence on His part, — some grace of preservation, of protection, of invitation, of warning, of consolation and encouragement, and of sweet communion.

What has He not done to withdraw thee from evil, and to lead thee to the right, to strengthen thee, and help thee to persevere? He alone knows what He has done for thee. Much of it escaped thy notice at the moment, or has since dropped out of thy memory; and how much secret grace has never even come to thy knowledge! But thou knowest

enough to be filled with love and gratitude to God. What would it be if thou hadst always been faithful to the grace received? Who can tell to what thou mightst not have attained? Dost thou owe Him less for the good He would have done, but which for thine own fault He could not do, than for that He has done? If He were to show thee now this chain of graces He had prepared for thee, and the high degree of glory to which they might have raised thee, what would be thy surprise, thy confusion, thy gratitude! Reflect now, and say to thyself, If God is my Father by nature, because He has created me, preserved me, and provided for every need; and by grace, because He has adopted me in his Son, by the union of the divine and the human nature in Him who is the only object of his complaisant regard, so that He sees me and loves me only in Him, and destines me to the same heritage,

the same glory, the same felicity ; if, too, this Father is infinitely lovely, if He unites in Himself all perfection, if He is the sovereign good of every intelligent being ; if, in short, under whatever aspect I view Him, He has an indisputable right to all the affections of my heart, — why am I so cold, so indifferent, when I utter these words, “ Our Father ” ? How is it that so often they awaken no idea in my mind, and excite no feeling ? Ah ! it is because I have not meditated profoundly enough upon all that is included in that name of Father ; upon the love it implies, and of which God has given me such manifest proofs ; upon the law, as gentle as it is just, which commands me to consecrate to Him all my affections, and to desire no other happiness than that of loving Him, — for really there is not and can not be any other. I am convinced of it now, by the little I have just read. I should be much more convinced if

I should make this inexhaustible theme the common subject of my meditations ; if I should incessantly ask God for new light upon it ; if I should seek it in the principles of faith, in the mysteries of religion, in the precepts of the gospel, which reduce every thing to the love of our Father in heaven ; in works of piety, whose object is to inspire and nourish the love of God ; in the examples of the saints, who became such because they loved God with all their mind, with all their heart, and with all their strength. Is He more their Father than mine ? Has He done more for them than for me ? Did He demand and expect more from them than He does from me ? My light upon this great subject would increase much more if I entered more fully into the practice of it ; if in my devotions and especially my communions, if in my good works and in the accomplishment of the duties of my position, if

in all the commonest acts of life, even such as eating and drinking, I had no other intention, no other aim, than to cherish and increase within me the love I owe to my Father in heaven. Am I here, indeed, for any other purpose than to love Him? Can my happiness on earth, any more than in heaven, be found in aught else than in loving Him? Ah, how foolish and blind I have been! How little I have known and practised the first and greatest of all my duties, —that of filial love, of entire and absolute devotion to my Father, of obedience to His holy will, desiring to please Him in every thing, and fearing to offend Him in the smallest thing! Pardon me the past, O most tender and best of fathers! I am resolved by Thy grace to expiate and repair it; to have no other thought, no other design, no other occupation, than to love, obey, and please Thee. As I can do nothing of myself, I give

myself to Thee with all the powers of my soul and all the faculties of my body ; that all which is mine, and which depends upon myself, may be applied and consecrated to Thy most holy love. Grant me grace that I may never lose sight of this gift that I make to Thee, and that I may never utter the Lord's Prayer without renewing it ! This is my intention, O my God ! Permit me not to wander from it, nor to revoke it by any sin, or by any involuntary unfaithfulness.

CHAPTER II.

Our Father.

WE have dwelt upon the name of father in considering God in his relations to each individual Christian only. Now let us consider this title as it relates to the whole body of Christians, composing one single family of which God is the Father, and, therefore, bound together in mutual love. Observe that, in the prayer which our Lord has taught us, we do not say *my* Father, but *our* Father ; that we do not address God in our own individual name, but in the name of all Christians ; demanding nothing for ourselves that we do not demand at the same time for them, with the same ardor, the same

desire of obtaining it for them as for ourselves from our common Father. This implies that we wish for them the same spiritual and temporal blessings that we wish for ourselves, that we love them as brethren, and that we are united to them by a pure and sincere charity. This fraternal love is, then, a duty which has its source in the Divine paternity, and in our common adoption in Jesus Christ. By baptism, every Christian is a child of God, the same as myself. He has also, like myself, Jesus Christ for his Brother. He has the same right that I have to the celestial heritage. I ought, then, to love Him because he belongs, like myself, to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, and is beloved by Them as I am.

We are separated on earth by time and space ; we are, for the most part, unknown to each other : but we have the same faith, the same worship, the same motives to love God ; we have the same destiny ; and, if we fulfil it,

we shall be united forever in the celestial country where all will know and love each other, and will be happy not only each in his own personal happiness, but also in that of all others ; where there will be no more mine and thine, no more of self, because " God will be all in all." This is the expression of St. Paul ; the full meaning of which is incomprehensible to us, it is so sublime : so intimate will be the union of the elect. God wishes that we should serve here below the apprenticeship of this love, and that the charity which must reign in our hearts in heaven should spring up on earth, and make here an anticipated heaven ; and that it should increase in us even to our latest breath.

Have I rightly understood, do I now understand, what that love is which I owe to my neighbor, especially my Christian brethren ; upon what foundation it rests, and unto what it should lead ? Have I understood that

although I do not hate him, yet if I have no affection for him, if I do not interest myself in him as in myself, if his salvation is indifferent to me, and if I do not contribute to him of my means, I cannot with truth say, "Our Father," nor recite the Lord's Prayer without finding in it my condemnation? I owe it to all men, because they are my equals, and made, like myself, in the image of God, to put myself in their place, and to put them in mine ; to treat them, according to the circumstances, as I would like, in similar case, that they should treat me ; not to do to them what I would think wrong if done to me, but, on the contrary, to do them all the good which I should desire for myself. This is the natural law graven on every heart, which justice and humanity require us to observe, and which we cannot violate without a secret reproach from conscience.

This law extends farther still. It is very

seldom, even among Christians, that it is faithfully practised ; that it is not infringed, if not in externals, at least by the disposition of the heart. This is not yet, however, Christian charity, which embraces all the obligations of the natural law, but is not limited to that. It must be supernatural in its principle, which is no other than habitual grace infused into us by the Holy Spirit, and by which we are placed in a state of loving God for Himself, and our neighbor for the love of God ; but, if I lose this habitual grace, I am incapable of exercising this love towards God and my neighbor until I recover it again. It must be supernatural in its motive. If I love my neighbor only because of his good qualities, because of the congeniality of his character, because of the services I have received or expect from him, this love has nothing in common with Christian charity. It is not meritorious in me. I must love him from the

motives God has laid down ; because he is, or may be, the child of God, and my brother in Jesus Christ ; because God and Jesus Christ love him, and have commanded me to love him. Charity must be supernatural in its exercise ; that is to say, grace must excite and accompany its acts, so that my will may concur with the divine will. The foundation of Christian charity is the fatherhood of God. Because he is the Father, and loves his Son, and loves us in his Son, through whom He has adopted us, He desires that we should love each other reciprocally as He loves us ; hence, if we do not love our brethren, God does not love us, and we do not love Him. Judge from this how the love of God for us, and our love for Him, are inseparable from our love for our brethren. To speak truly, it is one and the same love, appearing different according to the subject in which it resides, and the object to which it is

applied. In like manner, the Son of God, since He has united Himself to human nature, loves us all in the individual nature that He has taken, and by which He condescended to become like us. Therefore, He commands us to love each other as He loves us ; and He wishes that we should love Him, not only inasmuch as He is God, but inasmuch as He is man. If we do not love our brethren, it is impossible for us to love Him, either in His humanity or His divinity, either as the Son of God or as our Brother. Thus the love of Christ for man, and our love for Him, are equally inseparable from our love for our neighbor ; rather, it is one and the same love.

I find a third foundation of brotherly love in the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son eternally subsisting. It is by His dwelling in our hearts that we are truly the children of our heavenly Father, and the brethren of Jesus Christ. Oh, how we

should love each other, if we were all animated by the same spirit, that is, by the same love ! It is by the Holy Spirit that God is love, and that the Father and the Son are one in the love which they mutually bear each other. It is by Him, also, that all Christians ought to be of one heart and one mind ; and they would indeed be so if He possessed them all. The love of our neighbor is, then, no less than the love of God, the necessary result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ; and we banish Him from our hearts when we do not love our brethren. Unto what should this love lead us ? Even to the imitation and the expression, as nearly as possible, of the love of the eternal Father. When we were yet sinners and his enemies, He gave for us his only Son ; a gift which includes and surpasses every thing that an infinitely rich and powerful God could give. He sacrificed Him to procure our salvation. He desired that His

death should be the pledge and the price of our reconciliation. He assured our happiness at the expense of what was most dear to Him. This is one example of the way we should love our neighbor. Now let us give another.

Our love for our neighbor should bear the closest resemblance to that which Christ has manifested for us. It is my command, He said expressly, that "ye should love one another, even as I have loved you." "A new commandment I give unto you." The example of love I present to you to imitate did not exist before I came. My law is the law of love carried to excess, if there can be excess in the love which God commands, after having giving you the example. St. John hesitates not to conclude that this command requires us to give our life for our neighbor. "We know," said he, "the love of God, in that He has given His life for us. So ought

we to give our lives for the brethren." Pay attention to these words "we ought." It is not counsel, but in certain circumstances a duty, especially when it concerns his eternal salvation. Indeed, this brotherly love should be the faithful expression of the reciprocal love of God the Father and the Son. Christ has declared His intention in this matter in His last prayer before His passion, which may be regarded as His last will. He said, "I pray for them also which shall believe on Me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us." And again He says, "that they may be one, even as We are one : I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one ; . . . that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them " (St. John xvii. 21-23, 26). Consider these words, and implore divine light that you may be able to comprehend them ; for

any explanation that we may attempt to give will only enfeeble them.

My conclusion from all this is, that the love of our neighbor, as well as the love of God, is comprised in these two words, "Our Father ;" that they contain the most pressing motive and the most perfect model of both ; that we can never carry them too far ; that we always live below what the Father and the Son expect and command in this respect ; and that the perfect consummation of this love, one in principle, and double in object, is reserved for heaven, after we have made every endeavor here to attain to it. How is it with me? Can I reply, with any semblance of truth, that I wish to love, I try to love, and I do indeed love, God my Father, and my neighbor as I ought, always desiring to love them more?

Finally, it is not by words nor by feeling that I must judge ; but by deeds, which are

the true indication of the disposition of the heart. No self-examination is more important for me than that upon this point ; and it should be made with the greatest carefulness and honesty, since the whole Christian law is contained in these two precepts.

In order that I may recite the Lord's Prayer, then, with more confidence, I will examine my heart from time to time on these two points. I will pray God to put it, and by His grace I will try myself to put it, in the disposition in which it ought to be. Without this care, it will often happen that the sentiment of my soul will not be conformed to that which my lips express, and I shall be in danger of being rejected by my Father in heaven.

CHAPTER III.

Who art in Heaven.

THE heaven which is the abode of God is not the visible, material heaven where the stars shine. That dome was created for our use; and before it existed, as after it shall be destroyed, God was and will be forever in the heaven which belongs to Himself; that is to say, in His own immensity. He has no other place than Himself. He exists nowhere, neither in the manner of any body, nor in that of other spirit. The Scriptures have represented heaven as the dwelling-place of God only to accommodate itself to our imperfect manner of thinking, to help us understand that His abode is

where light, order, and purity reign ; but it is a light, an order, and a purity that surpass all our imaginations and conceptions. Whatever may be our notion of the true heaven, where we hope one day to live, our Father is in heaven, and we are upon the earth. Heaven is, then, our true country ; that is, the region where our Father dwells : and the earth is our place of exile, a foreign sojourn, where we only stop in passing, and where we have no fixed abode. Our Father does not appear to our sight ; we know Him only by His works, and by what faith reveals concerning Him : consequently, we can never be happy till we shall be where we can see Him as He is.

Heaven, the dwelling of our Father, is the assemblage of all true, substantial, immutable, eternal good. The good which the world offers has nothing real, except as it concerns the present life, which is only a

dream, a vapor which vanishes as soon as it appears. Its good is only a vain appearance ; it has no consistence ; it is passing away, and will some day be destroyed. At the moment of death, it will exist for us no longer. This being so, as we cannot doubt, what folly to attach ourselves to earth, for which we were not made, and which was made only for our bodily needs during the time of our exile ! What folly to seek an establishment here, an enduring fortune, or true happiness, as if we could find them ; to have a longing desire for these things, to be eager and anxious for them ; to form projects, the success of which often only tends to torment us ! What greater folly than to sacrifice conscience and eternal salvation to the acquisition and possession of this false wealth ! How can we be so blinded by our passions ? Where is our reason ? Where is our faith ? Even though all were to be ended with us at death, even though

we should die without any hope of life beyond the grave, without any hope of heaven, ought we not, even for our own comfort, to be moderate in desire, and in the use of worldly goods? Oh ! how is it that we can so debase ourselves? that we can forget, disdain, and trample under foot, our high destination? Our Father has created us only for Himself and for heaven. All that is not God is too small for the vast capacity of my soul. I carry in the depths of my heart a desire for immortality. The very idea of annihilation horrifies me. My dearest and constant wish is to be forever and forever happy. Faith shows me heaven as the place of my eternal felicity ; it shows it to me as the heritage which our Father has promised, which His only Son has acquired at the cost of His blood ; to which I have a right by my title of Christian and child of God ; of which I cannot be deprived except by my own fault :

yet I do not turn all my thoughts and affections towards heaven ; I do not sigh incessantly after it ; I do not march to my country by the way Christ has marked out ; I do not remove all obstacles, and surmount all the difficulties which lie in my path. I pause, I turn away, I recoil ; I make little effort to recall to mind the thought of heaven. Too often, alas ! I am occupied only with the world ; I incline towards it like the animals. I become attached to it ; I lose myself in it. I should even be tempted sometimes to sacrifice heaven, if I might remain always upon earth, although assured by constant experience that I am not, and cannot be, happy here. Is this conceivable ? Yet this is what most Christians do ; perhaps what I have done, what I may do again. Though I may not have carried things to this excess, have I not at least cause to reproach myself for esteeming and loving this world too much ; for

taking pride in my wealth, or being ashamed and wretched because of my poverty; for preferring myself to those who are more lowly born, who have less wealth, less honor, less power, less influence, than myself; or for envying those who are superior to me in all these vain advantages; for thinking more of preserving and increasing them, than of amassing a treasure of grace and glory for heaven? Notwithstanding all this, I still say every day, "Our Father who art in heaven;" but, in saying it, I have much difficulty in raising my thoughts and my desires to heaven. I aspire very feebly to the happiness of seeing and possessing my Father. I do not languish like the saints in expectation of the moment which will unite me to Him. On the contrary, I am tempted to fear that moment, and to banish it from my remembrance. Is it that I do not love my Father enough? Is it that I feel too far removed

from the holiness necessary to enjoy His presence? Is it that I do not make sufficient effort to acquire this holiness? Oh, how I should humiliate myself and be confounded! But, O God, let me not remain in this state! Let me rather change my heart and conduct. I wish it, and it is Thou who makest me wish it. Continue and finish in me this work of Thy grace; and, if necessary, plant so much pain and bitterness over the few days I have to pass on earth, that, in spite of natural desire, I may be compelled to sigh incessantly after the blessedness of eternity!

CHAPTER IV.

Hallowed be Thy Name.

ACCORDING to the order in which Jesus Christ put the petitions which compose His prayer, it is evident that the first duty of the Christian is to desire and demand above every thing else that the name of God may be hallowed. This name, infinitely holy in itself, is hallowed by Christians when they acknowledge and adore it ; when they glorify it by the worship they render it, and by the tribute of their praise ; when they not only carefully avoid profaning and dishonoring it, but when all their thoughts, words, and actions tend to its glory ; and when, in all their conduct, this intention is,

as it should be, at the head of all others. What is really my principal end? It is to promote the glory of God. Why did He create me and all other things? For His own glory. Of what is He especially jealous? Of His own glory. He lavishes upon us all His riches, even to wishing to share with us His happiness ; yet what is the one thing He will not, He can not, communicate to us? His glory. That which contributes in nothing to His glory is lost, and has no merit before Him. That which wounds His glory, in the slightest degree, displeases and offends Him, and can only draw down upon us His chastisement, unless reparation is made by a sincere repentance. Am I fully persuaded of this great truth, which is the basis of religion and morality, and at the same time the principal source of my happiness? My first interest being the interest of God, I am sure of all good, in working to glorify Him. The

idea of His glory is so exalted that it comprises eminently every thing which is advantageous for this life and the other. In occupying myself with what concerns God, I oblige Him to take special care of what concerns me. What am I doing, then, when in the service of God I am so absorbed with myself as to refer almost every thing to myself? If I do not absolutely peril my salvation, I certainly do hinder my perfection; beside, I realize very imperfectly the happiness attached to holiness, even here below; and the reward which is promised on high will suffer a notable diminution.

It is very important, then, that as many are guided by self-interest, and in their devotions and good works are too much occupied with themselves, they should seriously consider this. Mingling myself among others, am I not also of this number? Have I sought above every thing and in every thing

the glory of our Father in heaven? Is it the object which occurs to my mind the most easily and the most frequently? In regard to my sins, is that which afflicts me most, that which excites in me the deepest repentance, the thought of having dishonored the holiness of God, and having done what is derogatory to His glory? When I pray to Him, is my first care to praise Him, to adore Him for His perfections, to recount His benefits, to offer myself to Him, that I may glorify Him : in short, to abase myself before Him? Am I occupied in His presence with any thing beside myself and my own needs? Am I not tempted to fear that He will forget me if I forget myself in order to think of Him? Does it often occur to me to implore Him that His name may be hallowed, that He may make it known to the unfaithful who are ignorant of Him, that the whole universe may render Him the respect and the homage which

are His due? Is this the desire which is uppermost in my heart? Am I consumed and devoured with zeal at sight of public scandals, and the progress of impiety and wickedness? Is it the subject of my highest joy to see or understand the things which contribute to the glory of God,—the propagation of the faith, the reformation of manners, the renewing of piety, the public improvement? If it is true that the glory of the Father is that of the child, can I deceive myself that I am very far removed from the spirit which should characterize a child of God, while I have little love for Him, and am little interested in Him? O my Father! change, I beseech thee, my interior dispositions with regard to this great object. Inspire me from this moment, for all the remainder of my life, with a firm, inviolable resolution to hallow Thy name in every thing,—in my thoughts and intentions, my affec-

tions and desires, my words and actions ; to hallow it from day to day in the manner which is most excellent and most worthy of Thee ; to endeavor that it may be hallowed by all who depend upon me, and over whom I have authority ; to oppose with all my power, at least by my prayers, my complaints, and my tears spread before Thee, the torrent of impiety, irreligion, and license which threatens to overwhelm the world. Never, perhaps, have Thy children had cause to pray with more earnestness, that Thy name may be hallowed ; and so great is the evil, that Thou alone canst find the remedy. I unite myself, now and always, with all holy souls who do not cease continually to offer Thee their prayers, communions, fastings, sufferings, and even life itself, in reparation of so many indignities.

That the name of God may be hallowed, is to every Christian a matter of the most

vast importance ; it embraces, in a certain sense, every moment and every circumstance of life, and the employment of every faculty. It demands of those who take it truly to heart a constant watchfulness over themselves, great purity of intention, and a constant fidelity to grace. Christian soul, if thou sincerely desirest to obtain full success, the best means is to surrender entirely to God, that He may sanctify His name in thee and by thee, according to the design He has formed, and which He will manifest only in proportion as thou leavest thyself at His disposal. This consecration is the most perfect manner in which thou canst hallow His most adorable name ; and, moreover, in making God the absolute master of this liberty, thou puttest Him on guard over thee ; thou engagest Him to employ thee wholly for His glory. He alone knows in what, how, and to what points He wishes to be glorified by thee.

He alone has the means at His disposal. He asks only thy co-operation, which will be full and entire if He holds thee in His hand as an instrument pliable and bending to His will. If thou minglest with His work thine own views or thine own energy, or if thou shouldst attempt to anticipate rather than to follow His grace, thou wilt only spoil the work. In this dependence thou art exempt from all anxiety, from all fear, from all doubt, from all illusion ; thou art secure against the dangers either of cowardice or presumption ; and thou hast the fullest moral assurance of hallowing the name of God as perfectly as thou art capable, for it is He properly who hallows it, and thou only secondest Him.

CHAPTER V.

Thy Kingdom Come.

THE kingdom here desired is not that of nature, over which God necessarily exercises supreme authority and an absolute independence, as the Creator and Master of the universe. Nobody can wrest this kingdom from Him, nor weaken it, nor share it with Him, nor disturb it, nor suspend its movements in the slightest degree. We are subject to it like all other creatures; and we could not escape from it, whatever desire we might have to do so, or whatever effort we might make. This petition of the Lord's Prayer concerns the moral kingdom in which God rules over our wills, but only with our

consent ; to which we are entirely free to submit, although we have no right to resist, and which never extends beyond our obedience. This kingdom is glorious for God, because there is nothing forced on our part : it is the result of our own free choice. God proposes that we should accept Him for our King ; He invites us, He urges us, He even commands us ; and He adds to this rewards and threats : but He uses no compulsion. Indeed, what would be the use of constraint, when it is a question of winning the heart, in which violence can do nothing, and which is always master, as is proved by saying, I will, or I will not, have God to reign over me ? It is doubtless supremely just that God should rule over His children. The love they owe Him imposes upon them the law of submission and implicit obedience ; and this law can neither be hard nor oppressive to the true children of God. On the contrary, they

ought to consider it their glory and their happiness to observe it, and perform cheerfully all the sacrifices it may demand. Besides, the law of God has nothing in its object to which it is not for our interest to submit, it being entirely for our advantage ; and He exercises it with so much gentleness, so much wisdom, so much regard for our liberty, that He renders it infinitely agreeable. I say to God every day, "Thy kingdom come." If these are not vain words uttered by the lips alone, without the heart taking any part in them, it is evident that I thereby pledge myself to let Him reign supremely over me ; also, desiring that He may reign over others, to contribute to that end as far as lies in my power, according to my state and condition in life. Let us see if I fulfil these duties. Does God reign over my spirit? Does He govern all my thoughts? Does He regulate all my opinions? In every

emergency, do I follow the Spirit of God? or is it not rather my own spirit to which I listen? Have I no regard to what the world thinks, though I know it to be contrary to the thought of God? If I do not pass lightly over this examination, I shall find much in my life to reform. St. Paul said, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." So those who are led by any other spirit are not among His children. That sentence of the apostle, which is absolute, and admits neither exception nor restriction, contains a solemn warning. Shall I say, in order to re-assure myself, that I follow the leading of the Spirit of God in all essential things, and that I follow my own spirit and that of the world in all matters of less consequence?

It is obvious, then, that in these last things I do not conduct myself as a child of God, and in this respect am unworthy of the title.

It is, then, no less obvious, that, in following either the spirit of the world or my own spirit in matters which appear non-essential, I am liable to follow them also in things of moment, and to go far astray from the Spirit of God. Let us come to the facts. What are those things which I allow myself to judge according to the ideas of the world and to my own ideas, and not according to the Spirit of God? The world and my own spirit reject all the maxims of the gospel, dictated by the Spirit of God, concerning detachment from the riches, the greatness, and the pleasures of the world; concerning self-renunciation, and the necessity of bearing one's cross; concerning the love of God and one's neighbor,—even, if it were possible, to the extinction of self-love; concerning meekness, patience, humility, purity of intention; concerning the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Dare I say, that,

on all these and on other points, I judge according to the Spirit of God, without regard to my own judgment or to that of the world? Dare I say that any one of these points is of little consequence to the Christian, and that he may safely judge of it otherwise than God judges? Dare I assert, as to any one of these points, what is essential, and what is not, and draw the precise limits where, without endangering my salvation, I may differ from God's judgment, and may follow my own opinions and those of the world? Even among those who have embraced a life of devotion, there are unhappily many who do not permit God to reign in their hearts without hinderance; to regulate their thoughts and their conduct in matters of religion. If they were directed only by the Spirit of God, false and imperfect devotions would not be so common. They would pray more from the heart than the

lips ; they would be more earnest in reforming the interior than in composing the exterior ; in being docile, rather than obstinate and opinionated ; in allowing themselves to be judged by those who direct them, rather than preferring to judge themselves, and perhaps judging their directors ; in concealing their good works, rather than proclaiming them ; in bending their character to grace, rather than in accommodating grace to their character : in short, for this detail would be infinite, they would be careful to examine, condemn, and correct themselves, rather than to observe, censure, and reform others ; they would embrace a more just, more noble, more extended idea of Christian perfection ; they would waste nothing in minutiae, littleness, and scruples, either in undue severity or indulgence, and all sorts of compromises with nature. The kingdom of God established in our hearts will not permit us to change our

plan of action, and pass continually from one method to another : it will maintain in us a uniformity, an equanimity of temper, a peace and spiritual joy, that nothing can change or disturb. Does God reign over my heart? Is He the master of its movements and its affections? Is it He who excites them, who moderates them, who directs them? Do I apply myself, under His direction, to purify myself as much as possible from the leaven of self-love, — that enemy of all charity, — and even of the legitimate and true love that I owe to myself? It is principally by my earnestness in discovering self-love, so skilful in disguising itself ; by my courage in attacking it, and my ardor in pursuing it ; by my determination to spare it in nothing, — that I can decide whether the kingdom of God is established in my heart: Although I may have no criminal affections, yet have I no dangerous ones? Have I none that are vain and use-

less? Have I none that are excessive, however legitimate? Have I none purely natural, which it is my duty to sanctify, and which God would most assuredly sanctify if He governed me?

The principal study of the Christian should be his own heart; but is he capable of it if he is not enlightened by divine light? And does God communicate this light abundantly, at all times, to all objects, even the most delicate and imperceptible, for any but those over whom He reigns absolutely? The principal thing about which the Christian should occupy himself is the reformation of his heart; but will he have the will to undertake it, and the strength to accomplish it, if God does not constantly supply him with both these at his need? To whom does He grant this, in a measure sufficient for the consummation of this great work, except to those who have given themselves to Him, that He may reign

over them, and make them after His own heart? The success of this work depends doubtless upon ourselves, but it depends much more upon God ; and He works upon it with affection and distinguished care, only in favor of those who oppose no wilful resistance. Oh, what a difference in purity of heart there is between him who has made God the Master of his liberty, and him who pretends to dispose of himself in certain things, and up to a certain point, which he cannot fix, and which, if he could fix, it would be very difficult, not to say impossible, to hold ! Let God once reign over the heart and will, and He will not delay to reign over the whole being. All will obey Him. Nothing will resist Him. He will easily triumph over the opposition of a corrupt nature, of passions and habits even the most inveterate. What order, what harmony, what holiness, in the interior and exterior life of

a Christian whom God governs entirely ! Though it is supernatural grace which prompts him, yet he is so easy, so uniform, so unaffected, that he always appears perfectly natural. And this is what I ask of God, for His glory and my sanctification, when I say, "Thy kingdom come." Have I realized the fulness of this petition? Is it sincere on my part? No : if I do not give myself to God without reserve, I do not wish its entire accomplishment. His dominion over me must be the result of my free and entire will ; and I seem often to submit against my will, as to a painful yoke, that I shake off as much as I can. It should be unlimited, and I contract it : I limit it in a thousand things where I wish to preserve some right over myself. I do not offer this petition for myself alone. I must offer it for all Christians and for all men. I must desire that the kingdom of God may extend everywhere ; that there may be no

reasonable being on earth who is not submissive to it ; that true religion, with its dogmas and its morals, may be known, embraced, and practised in all the coming centuries, in every country, with all the perfection it demands, and of which men are capable, — in a word, that the universe may be an assembly of saints, depending for every thing upon grace ; and I ought to do every thing in my power, according to my condition, my talents, and the circumstances in which I am placed by Providence, for the establishment of this kingdom. It is to this end that all authority should be exercised ; that of a sovereign over his subjects, of a magistrate over those submitted to his charge, of a father over his children, of a master over his servants, of an instructor over the youths confided to him. To establish the kingdom of God in the soul, is especially the object of the ministrations of priests ; and they ought to be entirely devoted

to it. It becomes me, then, to see what are my obligations in this respect ; how I fulfil them ; in what I have not performed them, and in what I have performed them badly ; and to think with fear of the rigorous account I shall have to render at the great day. Our Father has promised that I shall reign with Him forever in heaven, if I allow Him to reign over me below, and over others in all that depends upon me. Jesus Christ, seated on the throne of His Father, has promised to share it with me. He says, "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." His word is pledged to it. This reign of God, and of the elect with God, in eternity, is the great object in which this petition of the Lord's Prayer terminates. It is the kingdom to which, for the glory of God and for my own happiness, I must aspire with all my might, carefully fulfilling the condition which assures me the enjoyment of it, and

despising the wealth, the grandeur, and the pleasures of earth, which are nothing in comparison to it.

CHAPTER VI.

Thy Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

HE who here teaches us to ask for ourselves and others the fulfilment of the will of our heavenly Father is the Son of God Himself, who descended from heaven to do His Father's will, whose life's work was to accomplish that holy will, who devoted Himself to it from the first moment of His entrance into the world, and who did, always and in every thing, that which was agreeable to His Father. If Christ, truly God as He was, was obliged, on account of His humanity, to submit to the will of His Father; and if He really carried His submission and His obedience even to death, and to death upon

the cross, how much more ought we to be submissive to God, — we who are only His creatures, we to whom He who is God of God gave us the example ! And He gave it because He became like us, and represented us. How should we fulfil this divine will ? As blessed spirits and saints accomplish it in heaven, — with the same fidelity, the same promptitude, the same love, the same detachment from outward things and from all self-interest. The good pleasure of God is the supreme rule among the inhabitants of heaven. When He signifies it to them, they conform to it with perfect exactness : they omit nothing ; they dispense with nothing ; they make no excuse — such a thought even does not occur to them ; they do not stop to reason about the order they have received, but they execute it ; they do not deliberate, they act ; they do not delay, they leave every thing, and go the moment God sends them.

They not only have no reluctance, but they manifest an eagerness, a zeal, an inexpressible joy ; they obey because they love, and as fully as they love ; and they rest all their happiness on obedience. Their disinterestedness is so pure that they never think of themselves ; and, at the slightest indication of the good pleasure of God, they would be ready to sacrifice their happiness.

Such is the model that Jesus Christ has given us in this prayer, and that He has Himself infinitely surpassed. If it is just that the will of God should be the only law of heaven, is it not also just that it should be the only law of earth ? Are we any less His creatures than the celestial spirits ? Does not His dominion extend over us, as well as over them ? Have we rights and privileges that they have not ? If conformity to the divine will is the principal source of their happiness, why should it not be also of ours ? The only dif-

ference between us is, that we are still on probation,—consequently are left to our own free will to obey or not, as we choose,—while they are at the goal : their condition is fixed and unchangeable ; and they are resolved, in the presence and possession of God, never to deviate from His will. This difference is to our advantage in more senses than one. Obedience above is a recompense : here below it is a merit. Our obedience alone can glorify God, because it is free on our part ; while theirs, however voluntary, is still a necessary result of their state. It is true, indeed, that our obedience is painful, it demands constant struggle, it costs sacrifice ; but it is just this that renders it acceptable to God, and precious in His sight. We should like it to cost us nothing but blessedness. But is this reasonable ? Is it consistent with our present condition ? We have one means of rendering our obedience sweet and easy. Nothing pre-

vents our using it : rather, every thing encourages us thereto ; and that is, to give ourselves wholly to God, that He Himself may accomplish His will in us, bending ours by the gentleness and the efficacy of His grace. The difficulty is, that we always prefer to remain master of ourselves in every encounter ; hence it happens that what God wills, we do not will.

Let us renounce this fatal right, which is a veritable usurpation. Let us acknowledge that we hold our free will from God ; let us consecrate it to Him, and use it according to His good pleasure. When we have consecrated it, love will teach us, as it taught the saints, to rest our glory and our happiness in submission and conformity to His will ; thereby we shall attain to the closest resemblance to the blessed to which we can possibly aspire on earth. If obedience is painful, we shall not regard it so, but we shall rather rejoice to make a sacrifice for God. In the various

events of life which vex or humiliate or crucify us, we shall behold only the good pleasure of God ; and this will be our strength and our consolation. If we naturally feel any repugnance, it will be an opportunity to wrestle and to conquer. Whatever sacrifice it may be necessary to make to the divine will, we shall make it heartily, in the thought that love lives upon sacrifice. On the one side, our courage and our generosity will gradually increase ; on the other, difficulties will disappear, and that which seemed impracticable in the beginning will become easy in the end. At last the will of God will become the nourishment of our soul ; so much so, that it will not be able to live except by that holy will, as is the case exactly with the angels and the saints, excepting, of course, the difference between their state and ours. How many saints have arrived at this degree of perfection ? We say daily, "Thy will be done," as

they did : but we limit ourselves too often to saying it with the lips, and with little attention, and only formally ; while they said it from the heart, with reflection, and by the power of grace. What we are satisfied with often reciting, without making it the rule of our life, they endeavored constantly to put into practice. But we have the same inducements which they had ; we are in similar circumstances : not a day passes without presenting some occasion to conform ourselves to the divine will, some occasion that vexes and disturbs us ; it may be to correct, or it may be to prove us. But we do not make the same use of these opportunities that the saints did. We rebel interiorly ; we murmur ; we yield to impatience, irritability, discouragement, sadness, sometimes to blasphemy and despair. What do we gain thereby ? We only increase the trouble ; and the will of God is none the less accomplished, but

without comfort, and without merit to ourselves.

Is it possible that a way of holiness being open to us, so sure, so short, so simple, so consistent not only with the principles of faith, but with the light of reason ; at the same time so easy, so sweet, so comforting, — and yet we refuse to walk in it? What does it require? To wish constantly what God wishes, and not to wish what He does not wish. Our perfection, our present happiness even, hangs only on this point. We cannot doubt it. Let us, then, immediately put our will in this holy disposition, and let us make, by grace, every effort to maintain it there. Then we shall find the peace that we have sought in vain elsewhere, — a peace interior, solid, lasting, sometimes even delightful, in the midst of the greatest afflictions and the most desolating crosses. What is it that God desires only, next to His own glory? Our happiness.

In the arrangements of Providence with regard to us, His end is to conciliate these two things, and to make them always move on together in the front rank. For this He has devised infallible means. It remains only for us to let Him work, and to acquiesce in every thing which happens to us, whether it is directly from Him, or by the intervention of His creatures. In wishing what He wishes, we wish for our own happiness. In accepting the means that He employs, we accept that which cannot fail to lead to it. Let us consider, then, what God ordains for us. We shall see that all events, even the smallest, are designed to make us practise some virtue, or to correct some vice ; especially to humble our pride, and mortify our self-love. We know by experience that these are the two sources of all the sins that close the gate of heaven, and of all the troubles which prevent our tasting any real happiness on earth.

Therefore, in conforming in every thing to the will of God, we exhaust, little by little, both of these sources ; and we secure our happiness, as far as possible, both in this life and in the life to come. Let us pray, then, sincerely, and with all the affection of our soul, that for the glory of God, for our happiness and that of our brothers, the will of God may be done by them and by us, and in them and in us. Let us pray that we may never raise any obstacle ; and, as this is a daily practice, let us accustom ourselves to being humble, to bending under the powerful hand of God, and to accepting every thing which comes from Him, persuaded that He has in view only our good. In all trying circumstances, let us have on our lips, and especially on our heart, these admirable words of Christ, "Thy will, not mine, be done."

It may be observed here, that these three petitions are the best acts of love we can

make ; and, consequently, fidelity in reducing them to practice is a continual exercise of love, even of the purest love, since God is directly its object, — which does not exclude our happiness, but which assures it. We address these prayers to God, because He alone can give us the disposition of love which they imply, because we cannot co-operate to perform them effectually as we ought, without His grace ; and, as every blessing comes from Him, we begin with the prayer which obtains them all for us.

CHAPTER VII.

Give us This Day our Daily Bread.

IT is only after having prayed to God about that which concerns Himself, that we are directed to think of ourselves, and to solicit Him for our own needs. In the order of nature, children ask their fathers for their daily food. In this respect, God is incomparably more our Father than any earthly father can be ; for He, as first and universal cause, provides for the wants of every creature : and under the name of bread is comprised every thing which is necessary to preserve this present life. All men, young and old, rich and poor, great and small, are, as regards temporal necessities, in the condition

of children, absolutely unable to provide for themselves unless God furnishes the means. We contribute to it, indeed, by our care, our labor, and our industry ; for, since the Fall, we have been condemned to eat our bread by the sweat of our brow. But our labor and our industry can produce nothing of themselves : they are only aids to Providence, who is the true support of the human race, who merits on this account all our gratitude, and to whom we manifest our dependence, when we ask Him every day to “give us our daily bread.” Since the fall of the first man, he and all his posterity have been obliged to labor in order to live : it follows, consequently, that whoever can work, and does not work, has no right to a subsistence ; he has no claim to ask any thing of God, and should not complain if it is refused him. If, however, he neglects nothing which he can accomplish by his own labor, and by the employment of

his talents according to the command of God, then he may confidently trust that He who feeds the birds of the air will not be unmindful of him. It is bread, it is what is necessary, that we ask of God ; what will nourish the body, and not what will encourage sensuality ; what will protect us from harm, not what will keep us in idleness, luxury, and vanity. Our wants supplied, we should be content to rest there, and avoid all excess, which is no less harmful to the body than to the soul.

Let us use the gifts of God according to His intention, and not to offend Him. Let us confine ourselves to their simple use, and not seek indulgences which are unworthy of an immortal soul, and which God forbids. Let us always remember that the present life is only a means of obtaining eternal life ; and, if our present life ought not to be our end, how much less should that be which is destined only to preserve it ! If God refused

temporal blessings to those who abused them, we should never abuse them. Should we be less sober and less prudent because the correction of this abuse is deferred, it may be, to the other life? Let us, then, eat in His presence with gratitude the bread He gives us ; let us eat it with the intention of devoting to His service the strength it gives. Let us not be anxious for the morrow. It is our daily bread we ask. Let it suffice that we obtain it, and let us not extend our thought beyond. To-morrow we shall repeat our request for new needs. Has one ever seen him want for bread, who, after taking the prescribed measures, leaves the result and reposes upon God? Why these fears, these forebodings, these precautions, so derogatory to the goodness of our Father? Why are we not like children who prefer to obey and please their parents, and who live without care of that which concerns their life? Avarice,—

disguised under the term economy, — and distrust, anxiety, and all the troubles of which bodily wants are the occasion, are condemned by this petition of the Lord's Prayer ; which, if rightly understood and practised, will admirably regulate our feelings and our conduct with regard to earthly things, will detach our affections, will moderate our desire to acquire and keep, and will elevate us to a noble independence in the use of that which our necessities demand. We do not say, "give me my bread," but, "give us our bread ;" asking our common Father for all His children, upon a principle of universal charity. If, then, some of our brethren are needy, and God gives us an abundance, it is an indication that He wishes we should come to the relief of their indigence, giving them a portion of our superfluity : for it is evident that it is His intention to grant support to all, since He requires we should ask it for all ; but this

intention would be frustrated if the rich were not the established ministers of His providence in respect to the poor, and if they should not enter into His arrangements which are thus regulated to give opportunity to the rich as well as the poor to exercise many virtues, especially as He is not pledged to provide for the poor by miracle. Hence, we go directly contrary to the will of God, and to the petition He has put in our mouth, when we do not, from our abundance, relieve the poverty of our brothers ; and we deserve to be deprived of the comforts we have the hardness to refuse them. If God does not deprive us of them, it is because He has in reserve for us some greater sorrow. Besides, the bread which God gives you is due no less to the prayers of the poor than to your own prayers ; since they have asked for you as much as for themselves. You owe Him, then, as His portion, what you have above

your need ; and He has an acquired right to it.

According to the explanation of the holy fathers, this bread is the Eucharistic Bread, which is the supernatural bread of our souls, which should be no less daily than ordinary bread, and which our Father would be disposed to distribute every day if we were in a condition to eat it every day. We should neither doubt His intention in this respect, nor that of Jesus Christ, who gives His flesh in the eucharist, that we may understand that, as common bread is our daily food, so His body is designed to be the daily nourishment of our souls.

It is also the wish of our mother the Church, who has declared that she desired the faithful should communicate every time they assist at the Holy Sacrifice, according to the custom of the early centuries ; and certainly, as St. Ambrose said, we ought all to live in such a way as to be fit to participate

daily in this heavenly banquet. It is at least important that we should not be satisfied with a triennial communion, which the Church makes a rigorous obligation, or even with a monthly communion only ; and that we should never let a long time pass without approaching the holy table. Communion frequently received, with the right disposition, is the most effectual means of attaining to Christian perfection. The Fathers understand also by this bread, the word of God, whether announced from Christian pulpits, or given in books of devotion. Let us, then, be careful to hear this divine word as often as we can, with the desire to profit by it ; and let us form the habit of daily spiritual reading. We shall draw from both practices the greatest advantage ; and we shall be indeed guilty if we do not make use of the supernatural food which God gives us in profusion, and which He requires us to ask of Him.

CHAPTER VIII.

*And Forgive us our Trespases, as we Forgive
these who Trespas against us.*

THE sense of the fifth petition is expressed in these words, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Who of us is not indebted to Divine Justice on account of his sins? We are not only debtors to God, but insolvent debtors. If He did not remit our debts, it would be impossible for us to discharge them. His goodness inclines Him to remit them, provided we ask Him ; but, in the prayer He has dictated, He imposes a condition so just that we cannot refuse it. It often happens, that, even as we offend God, so our neighbor offends us, and becomes a debtor

to us, as we are to God. If we forgive our neighbor, if we remit the debt at his request, if we retain no resentment, no ill-will toward him, God, on His part, has promised to grant us the pardon of our offences, to remit the debts we have contracted towards Him, and to remember them no more against us. But He has promised it only on this condition ; and He so rigorously requires us to fulfil it, that He has made it a law that we shall not ask the forgiveness of our sins except in proportion as we forgive our neighbor's. "Forgive us as we forgive : " that is to say, evidently, do not forgive us if we do not forgive ; require Thy rights of us in all severity, if we require ours the same. But if we are indulgent, and disposed to pardon ; if when our neighbor expresses his repentance, and begs us to forget the wrong or the trouble he has caused, we renounce all thought of revenge, all rancor even, and become sincerely

reconciled to him, God will do the same by us: He will show Himself an indulgent Father to His guilty children, and will restore us to His favor. Is not the condition just? Is it not even infinitely advantageous? Our brothers are our equals by nature, but what are we compared with God? A mere nothing before the Infinite Being. However great may be the offence of our neighbor, what is it compared with that of which we are guilty toward the Divine Majesty? Christ estimated the death of our brother at a hundred farthings, and ours at ten thousand talents; but He made this valuation only to touch our imagination, for there is absolutely no comparison between the two debts. Has the resentment, which we pretend it would be just to hold against our neighbor, any proportion to that which God has a right to exercise over us? Is our neighbor as powerless to give us satisfaction as we are to sat-

isfy the Divine Justice? What good results to us if God forgives, and what evil if He does not forgive! Weigh well all these considerations, and you will conclude that God could not put our reconciliation with Him on better terms. Do not regard as worthless the consolation of being able to say at death, I have forgiven, Lord, and I trust, upon Thy word, that Thou wilt forgive me. But the laws of the world, you say, my interests even, are opposed to my forgiving. Your interests! Have you any greater interest than that of obtaining the mercy of God? 'Were it necessary for that to sacrifice your wealth, your happiness, your life even, could you balance it? The sentence has been pronounced, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy." Will you live and die with the assurance of experiencing a like judgment? The laws of the world! What are the laws of the world to the Christian,

who should recognize no other law than the gospel? Consider the two precepts of Christ which immediately follow His prayer, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." First precept, infinitely favorable to you. "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you." Second precept, infinitely terrible to you. Do not allege either the world or your own interest as an excuse. The obstacle that hinders is your pride ; and that is the source of all your sins against God. It is that which God wishes to crush, in commanding you to forgive your brother ; it is that which closes your heart against repentance : and it is to soften the heart, to open it to the grace of repentance, that God has prescribed meekness, and indulgence towards your neighbor.

We must not be deceived. Sincere forgiveness of injuries, and cordial love towards

our enemies, are the most difficult points in Christian morals. But the difficulty springs not from the depth of the thing itself; it results rather from the little care we take to unite ourselves to God our Father, and to become like Him. God, though infinitely great, and offended as He is, has no difficulty in forgiving us, in foregoing his own rights. He even anticipates us, and makes the first advances. Alas! should we ever of ourselves think to return to Him, should we be capable of it, if His grace did not excite us thereto. Yet we who are nothing, to whom in reality nothing is due, we who, strictly speaking, cannot complain of any offence, often have great difficulty in forgiving our neighbor, even when he returns of his own accord, acknowledges his wrong, and humiliates himself before us. It costs us still more to make advances, and to invite reconciliation. That is something not to be mentioned. If we

have pardoned once, that is a reason for not pardoning the second time, — a certain sign that we have not entirely forgotten the injury, and that there is always remaining in the heart a leaven of hatred. Does God treat us in this way? Do we not find in Him again and again the same clemency, after having often and long abused it? Ah! “Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

It is on the subject of loving our enemies, that Christ gives us this rule. Let us forgive as He does, without bounds and without measure. Let us not fix any limit beyond which grace is not to be hoped from us. In this respect, let us have the same disposition toward our brothers that God has toward us. Let us remember from that which experience may already have taught us, that, as there is no torment equal to that which a proud and vindictive soul suffers, so there is no joy so pure as that which one who pardons tastes;

no peace like that of a meek and humble spirit, which no offence can irritate ; nor is there any means more efficacious for gaining an easy access to God, for praying to Him with confidence, and obtaining from Him the graces we most need.

CHAPTER IX.

Lead us not into Temptation.

EVERY thing is a snare to us in this life ; every thing is cause or occasion of temptation. No age is exempt ; no time nor place, no condition of life, no occupation, is secure from it. Temptations from external objects, which flatter the senses, excite the imagination, allure and seduce the soul ; temptations from the world in the midst of which we must live, and whose maxims, principles, examples, authority even, and tyranny, draw us toward vice, and restrain us from virtue ; temptations from Satan, who never sleeps, who goes about incessantly “like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour,”

who respects neither solitude nor places of prayer nor the most holy exercises, who stirs up the passions, who spreads a thick cloud over the spirit, who overwhelms the soul with trouble, who violently shakes the will, and excites such delight that it is almost impossible to discern whether we have consented or not. Temptations still more dangerous spring from our pride, our self-love, our unholy passion, our curiosity, all the vices that we have in embryo, and that age only develops and strengthens. Instead of finding in ourselves any resource against the enemy without, we are our own most formidable enemies. We should have nothing to fear from others if we were not secretly in league with them. Even with a good intention, and after the strongest resolutions, what weakness we show in emergencies ! We are astonished at ourselves ; we could not have believed that we were so frail. If the hand

of God did not sustain us, we should make as many falls as steps.

Nevertheless, in spite of all their dangers, temptations are useful and even necessary. "What does he know who has never been tried?" He knows not the extent of his misery and corruption ; he foolishly presumes upon his strength ; he has not true and deep humility. He knows not God, nor the work of His grace in guiding souls, nor the perfect confidence they ought to have in Him, nor His faithfulness in helping the needy who call upon Him, nor the invincible power of His protection. The more devoted one is to Him, the more acceptable one is in His sight, the more should one expect to be proved by temptation. To wish to be exempt from it, is to renounce the most valuable thing in the practice of virtue.

What shall we do, then, and what part shall we take between the necessity of being

tempted for our advancement, and the peril of being conquered? Nothing but to throw ourselves into the arms of our Father, and to implore Him to keep us from falling. Let us call upon Him incessantly. We have no fear of not being heard, and helped accordingly. Let us keep very near Him, and evil will not approach us. His holy presence, if we maintain it precious in our heart, will repulse all attacks of the enemy, and will prevent him, notwithstanding all his efforts, from penetrating into that heart in which God dwells.

But to be assured that God will not let us fall into temptation, in the first place we must never expose ourselves to it rashly, nor seek occasion for it, but rather anticipate it, and flee from it as far as possible. It has been said, that "he who loves perils shall perish in them." That we may feel under obligation to avoid them, it is not necessary that they should be evidently dangerous: it is

sufficient that they be suspicious, and that we have good reason to distrust them. In the second place, if the occasions are unavoidable, or entire surprise, let us not be alarmed : let us have recourse promptly to God, in order that He may sustain us in the trying circumstances in which His Providence has placed us, or that He may withdraw us from the evil into which our own imprudence has thrown us ; and let us not doubt that He will come to our help. In the third place, it is necessary to have an habitual horror of sin, without distinction of its magnitude or lightness ; so that this impression may be the first we receive at the slightest danger of exposure to it. It is necessary, furthermore, to be so accustomed to prayer, that recourse to it on critical occasions may be the first movement of the soul, almost before any deliberation. In general, distrust of ourselves, and confidence in God, watchfulness, recollection, the

spirit of prayer, fidelity to grace even in little things, will shield us from a great many temptations, or will sustain us in those that God may permit for our spiritual good.

CHAPTER X.

But Deliber us from Evil.

WE must understand here by “evil,” what Christ understood, and what He wishes His disciples should understand. In the thought of God, which must be the rule of our thought, there are but two veritable evils, — sin, and hell the eternal punishment of sin. These are the evils that the Christian should fear, and from which he should ask God to deliver both himself and others. While we live, we have always to apprehend lest we fall into sin, and from that into hell. Our perfect deliverance will not take place till death, if death finds us in a state of grace. It depends upon ourselves, with the divine help

which is offered us, to preserve sanctifying grace, or to recover it ; but it depends only upon God to establish us forever in that happy state by the stroke of death, which He gives when He pleases. It is this which is called final perseverance, the most precious of all the gifts of God, because it assures our eternal happiness. It is a pure gift, that we can acquire only by humble entreaty, as St. Augustine said, and that we should implore absolutely and unconditionally ; for it is not permitted us to be indifferent in this respect, even under any pretext of disinterestedness. No faithful soul either can or should say to God, Deliver us from sin and eternal death, if it be Thy good pleasure ; but, Deliver us from both these because it is Thy good pleasure. As, however, that which merits hell, that which the pains of hell punish sufficiently only because they are eternal, that which directly attacks the infinite majesty and holi-

ness of God, is in itself a greater evil than hell, and more to be feared, it follows that sin is the evil that every Christian should fear above all others ; and that he should supremely detest and avoid all compromise with it, because it is an offence against God : and there is nothing a Christian should not choose, nothing to which he should not expose himself, rather than to offend God. Whoever does not think thus has no idea of sin or its malice.

We ask God to deliver us from death, and to preserve us during this life, because our corruption and our weakness are so great that it is impossible for us to be secure without His special protection ; because the circumstances and occasions to which we are exposed often depend upon His Providence alone, and it belongs only to Him to remove or avert them ; for He is the Master, who only can change the interior disposition which prompts

us to sin, and He is always ready to hear beyond our prayers, and to second all our efforts. But this prayer is not sincere, if we are not saturated, by meditation and reading, with the great truths calculated to inspire us with the most lively horror of sin ; if, knowing our weakness by oft-repeated experiences, we do not carefully avoid every occasion of sin ; or if, on the contrary, we seek such occasions, and throw ourselves into them with zest and eagerness ; if we presume upon ourselves, or on the help of God, which is not vouchsafed when we voluntarily expose ourselves ; if we live in dissipation and forgetfulness of God, leaving our senses and imagination open to exterior objects ; especially if we do not use the means God has put into our hands to keep us from sin, such as watchfulness, prayer, fasting, and frequenting the sacraments. Let us add, finally, that, to preserve ourselves more certainly from griev-

ous sin, we must be determined not to commit the slightest fault intentionally, and to correspond to grace with the utmost fidelity. Therefore it is important to be convinced in good time, that, next to mortal sin, the greatest of evils is venial sin in itself, and still more in its consequences, when it is committed deliberately ; that all voluntary resistance to grace is never free from fault ; that it grieves the Holy Spirit, and leads the soul gradually to its downfall. Hence, in order to ask God with perfect confidence to deliver us from evil, and to reckon upon His assistance in our need, let us begin by delivering ourselves from venial sin with the help of His actual grace. The right use of thi sgrace will draw down upon us other graces. Then let us take every precaution and measure that Christian prudence may suggest. Let us watch over every movement of our heart. Let us stifle all our passions at their birth ; let

us give them no encouragement, and never let them gather so much force that we cannot master them. Let us not fail ourselves, and God will never fail us. But to hope that He will deliver us, while we do nothing for our own deliverance, is a gross illusion. God requires of us efforts. He places us in a condition to make them. He has promised to second them ; and, if we are courageous and faithful, He will crown our fidelity with final perseverance. Concerning temporal evils, whether public, such as wars, famine, pestilence, and other similar calamities ; or private, which attack our property, our health, our peace, or even our life, — these are not properly evils to the Christian, but rather tests which become to him either a blessing or a curse, according to the way in which he regards them, and the use he makes of them. Sickness, infirmities, and death are the just punishment of the disobedience of our first

parents. In considering them thus in relation to divine justice, let us submit to them for ourselves as well as for those who are dear to us ; let us accept them without a murmur or complaint ; and let us draw from them what God designs we shall draw for our salvation.

There are other evils caused by the injustice of man. God does not desire them, but He permits them, and will make them serve His own glory ; His intention being that we should use them to our sanctification. Let us regard them under this aspect, in the order of His providence. Let us endure them, because such is His good pleasure. Let us heartily forgive those who cause them ; and let us pray, as our Lord commands, for those who persecute and slander us. Let us never forget that the greatest good, the redemption of the human race, was accomplished by Jesus Christ enduring similar evils for us ; and that

the most heinous of crimes has given place to the most sublime of sacrifices. In uniting our cross to His, we are assured of eternal happiness ; and we are indebted for it to what the world considers as great evils.

Finally, there are evils that we can impute only to ourselves ; our passions and excesses of what kindsoever, which affect our health, waste our fortune, create troubles, and ruin our reputation. These evils are a means which God in his mercy employs to draw us away from our disorders, to lead us to expiate them, and to open to us the way to heaven. They produce this effect, if, after having detected and corrected the evil habits which are their source, we accept them in a spirit of penitence, and bless God for having afflicted and humiliated us. The spirit of the Church is to pray God to avert public calamities, or to cause them entirely to cease, in order that Christian people may be less occupied with

their own miseries, and may serve Him with more devotion, tranquillity, and spiritual joy. And it is the duty of the faithful to unite with the Church in this intention, but also, while the calamities last, to bear them with patience. God permits us to ask Him for deliverance from temporal evils, for ourselves and for those in whom we are interested; but this prayer must be humble, peaceful, submissive, and subordinate to His good pleasure, for our own spiritual good and that of our neighbor. The faithful are only too much carried away with themselves not to pray in these extremities; there is no need of exhorting them to that: but it is seldom that they do it with a pure and Christian intention; nature often has more to do in these prayers than grace. It is necessary, also, that they ask with as much ardor and importunity for deliverance from their spiritual evils, and for advancement in virtue. The present life,

even, regarded in one sense, is an evil, because of the temptations which beset us, and the constant danger of offending God and losing our souls. It is an evil in that it is an exile, and keeps us banished from the heavenly country and the sight of God. Under this aspect, it is proper to ask Him to shorten our days, yet being willing to remain upon earth as long as it may please Him. The desire for death in good Christians springs from the desire to make their salvation sure ; and, in holy souls, it is the effect of divine love which makes them sigh for the moment when they shall be re-united forever to Him they love. May this desire one day be ours !

CHAPTER XI.

Practical Conclusion.

THIS short exposition is sufficient to show that the Lord's Prayer includes or implies the principal points of Christian morality, and of our duty to God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Each, according to his need and condition, will discover there, on searching, an inexhaustible source of light and affection. But it is necessary to put it in practice. It is useless to read, reflect, and meditate, if we do not resolve to perform. We must also expect to render a strict account to God for the light which has enlightened without reforming us. I grant that it is not possible, every time we recite this prayer,

to have distinctly before our minds the detail of all the things contained therein. Neither does God require this ; but He desires that we should be so sufficiently instructed, according to the capacity of each, in the meaning of this divine prayer, as to have in our hearts the feelings which ought to result from it, and to make it the rule of our life. To this end it would be well to read seriously, attentively, and repeatedly the preceding exposition, or some similar one ; permitting grace to act upon our souls, and abandoning ourselves to the holy thoughts and pious affections that it may inspire. It would be still better to take each one of the articles of which this prayer is composed, as a subject of daily meditation, — each one applying it to his own special state and disposition, — and to continue this exercise just as long as the soul can find any nourishment in it. If one has no facility in meditating, it will suffice to put one's self in the

presence of God, beseeching Him to instruct one Himself, and to give the understanding and spirit of each petition, with the necessary grace to practise it. This prayer, if we will only make it, listening to God in silence, with humility, simplicity, and docility, will be as instructive and useful as books and reflections, though we should never neglect to make use of these when we have them at hand. We should examine ourselves seriously, to ascertain if we have lived up to this time, or if we have resolved to live henceforth, according to the spirit of this prayer: for example, if we regard God as a father, and if we have in this respect the disposition He has a right to expect from His children; if we love other Christians as brothers in Jesus Christ, and if we wish for them all the temporal and spiritual good we desire for ourselves, and do for them all the good we are able; to examine, also, in

what we hallow the name of God, and in what we fail ; what we can do more for ourselves and others ; and so on with each petition.

An examination like this, made in the presence of God, will be of the greatest advantage, and will put us in the way of an entire reformation of our principles, our affections, and our conduct. It will prompt us to make upon each point good resolutions, to follow them, and to render a faithful account of them, which is the work of a good will. In thus submitting the plan of life to the Lord's Prayer, we should always have before our eyes one simple object, which should not fatigue the attention of the mind ; the strength of the will should be concentrated upon this single end, and we should consider whether we are making progress, or whether we are going backward. This prayer should be the subject of our daily examination, and it should hold a place as an exercise for Holy

Communion. We should draw from it, during the day, subjects of meditation and prayer, and a throng of holy thoughts and aspirations. Every thing invites to the embracing of a method so simple, founded upon the authority of Christ Himself; and, by following it, we shall surely attain to a very high perfection. How many good souls have been sanctified, knowing only "Our Father," and having no other teacher than the Holy Spirit! Though we should possess no other advantage than that of reciting this divine prayer with a recollected spirit, and a heart penetrated with affection, this would be very great, and would draw down upon us the benediction of our heavenly Father.

St. Augustine said formally, in several places, that the Lord's Prayer, recited as it should be, would entirely efface our daily faults. Is not this a reason for learning to say it well?

I will end this little work by an excellent precept, which I have insinuated more than once , viz., Give yourself to Jesus Christ with all your heart, that He may instruct you Himself upon the truths He has comprehended in His prayer, that He may inspire in you a clear perception of them, and that He may grant you the grace necessary to practise them as perfectly as He desires. You will certainly be heard if you desire to be.

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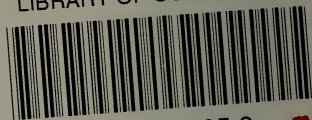
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